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THE WAR IN THE BALKANS

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THE roar of the cannon in the Balkans has given resonant emphasis to the dictum, too often ignored by statesmen, that no problem is solved until it has been solved aright. The penalty of war in 1912 is the outcome of the crime of diplomacy in 1878, when Disraeli and Bismarck, at the head of the reactionary forces in Europe, restored to the hazards of Ottoman rule the Christian populations of Macedonia and Thrace that had been liberated by the conquering arms of Russia. It is the struggle of virile, young-old nationalities, cramped and crippled by the decrees of chancellors, that has precipitated the present ominous crisis upon the ancient battle-field of Europe.

When the hostilities between Italy and Turkey broke out last year the most elaborate precautions were taken by Christendom to "isolate" the conflict. The international finger of warning was shaken vigorously in the faces of Bulgaria, Servia, Greece, and Montenegro. These minor peoples, tugging at the leash in their desire to fly at the throat of their old oppressor, were solemnly notified that under no circumstances would they be permitted to complicate the calculations of their betters by undertaking movements of their own, military or diplomatic. The murmur of discontent grew menacing beneath the surface of things, however, and at the end of the past summer the chancelleries

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again served notice upon the Balkan States individually that they were under bonds to keep the peace. On the evening of September 20th the lights went out in the Foreign Offices at London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna, and be-ordered Excellencies to whom the task of maintaining the equilibrium of the terrestrial globe had been intrusted by the mandates of parliaments or the decrees of sovereigns betook themselves to their late dinners, predisposed to good digestion by the tranquillizing conviction that the dogs of war were finding a safe outlet for their pent-up energies in harmless, though noisy, baying.

The unexpected, always a certainty in Balkan affairs, occurred in mid-forenoon of the 21st, when the telegraph-wires flashed to the breakfast-tables of chancellors and permanent under-secretaries the astonishing news that the forked lightning was already riving the thunder-clouds that had hovered over southeastern Europe since the father of the oldest statesman of them all was in swaddling-clothes. Vague reports in cipher conveyed the information that the impossible had come to pass—that the Balkan nations, but yesterday mere pawns upon the international chess-board, had combined for a common purpose and stood ready to enforce their collective will at the gleaming points of half a million bayonets. The event was a sufficiently interesting development even from the purely diplomatic point of view. For many years Turkey and the powers had been setting race against race, nationality against nationality, in what Lord Salisbury sardonically designated as the “rat-pit” of Macedonia, and had dominated the situation by dividing the councils of the discontented elements. Intensive inquiries by ministers and chargés, whom the march of most recent events had caught napping, brought to light the amazing details of an international *coup d'état* hardly predated in the annals of our time for largeness of scope and completeness of aim. The Foreign Offices learned, to their consternation, that Bulgaria, the most alert and most efficient, as well as the youngest, of the Balkan States, had again outwitted the chancelleries of the powers; that Bulgarian diplomacy, which under Premier Stambouloff in the late eighties had unsuccessfully essayed the task of bringing the peoples of the Peninsula to an agreement for common action, had succeeded under Premier Gueshoff, in 1912, in compromising the differences among neighbors, and had

brought to a fulfilment the dream of a coalition against Gladstone's "unspeakable" Turk.

The issue that confronted the powers at this juncture of events was humanitarian and not territorial. The immediate demand of the Balkan Federation on its initial appearance upon the arena of international affairs stipulated only the introduction of reforms in Macedonia and Thrace—reforms to which the signatories of the Treaty of Berlin had solemnly pledged themselves in 1878. The scheme adopted by the international congress that met to readjust the relations of the world after the Russo-Turkish conflict provided for the establishment of autonomous administrations, under the overlordship of the Sultan, in Macedonia and Northern Thrace. The results of the application of the scheme of reforms in Northern Thrace, under the designation of Eastern Rumelia, the union between the Bulgarians of the principality and those of the province south of it, in 1885, in the face of the protests of the powers and of Turkey, and the final annexation of Eastern Rumelia by the newly proclaimed kingdom in 1908, are events of yesterday which have contributed greatly to the civilization of the Balkan Peninsula. The fate of Macedonia and Southern Thrace—the scene of the present struggle—presents a sharp contrast to the happy outcome of Bulgarian rule in Eastern Rumelia. Relying upon the inability of the powers to exert combined pressure to effect the enforcement of the provisions of Article XXIII. in the remaining possessions of the Ottoman Empire in Europe, Sultan Abdul Hamid successfully evaded the obligations which he had undertaken under the mandate of the powers, and the vilayets remained the helpless but constantly protesting victims of the Turkish abuses which had brought on the Russo-Turkish War.

To the neighboring Christian states—Bulgaria, Servia, Greece, and Montenegro—the non-application of Article XXIII. in its entirety perpetuated an element of vital peril. The organization and maintenance of large armies, to the detriment of impoverished peoples; the frequent outbreaks of hot irritation in Bulgaria, Greece, Servia, and Montenegro that invariably attended the appalling repetition of massacres of Bulgarians, Greeks, Servians, and Montenegrins across the boundaries, and often within sight and hearing of the frontier guards; and, finally, the interminable expendi-

tures involved in the succor and rehabilitation of refugees from Turkey—these are some of the features of the old régime which were perpetuated in the territory once liberated by the sword of Alexander II. of Russia, by the failure of the powers to carry out their promises.

Against this intolerable state of affairs the small nations bordering upon Turkey have made frequent but ineffectual protests to the powers for the past three decades. In 1906, upon the outbreak of an unprecedentedly formidable revolutionary movement among the Bulgarians of Macedonia and the characteristic excesses that attended its suppression, the collective conscience of Europe felt the gnawing of the tooth of remorse. There were various conferences between statesmen and sovereigns, and, finally, after a visit which the Tsar of Russia paid to the Emperor-King of Austria-Hungary at Mürzsteg, the “concert” undertook what promised to be an effective attempt to postpone the crisis in the Balkans by introducing a programme of reforms in the disturbed vilayets under the supervision of a Europeanized gendarmerie and a European fiscal administration. The application of the new order of things had hardly begun when an extraordinary event at Salonica precipitated an entirely unexpected situation. This event was the proclamation of the now famous constitutional order by the Young Turks which made such a dramatic appeal to the sympathies of the world. The sound of the unaccustomed words “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” upon Ottoman lips at Salonica fired even the deadened imaginations of the subject races, accustomed for centuries to the contemptuous epithets of “*giaour*” and “*rayah*.” Enver Bey, the leader of the spectacular revolution, exchanged embraces with Zandansky, the Bulgarian insurrectionary chief, and all along the line of battle of the races a general demonstration of reconciliation, accompanied by pledges of undying loyalty to the Young Turkish reformers, became the order of the day in the region lately devastated by the tramp of armed battalions.

In this phase of the Balkan crisis, destined to bring the shadow of Armageddon lowering upon Europe out of the Near East, the powers immediately interested in carrying out the Mürzsteg programme found their opportunity to abandon the distasteful task; and the cry of “*Yasshahsin Houriet!*” raised on the shore of the *Ægean* was followed

precipitately by the announcement from the Western capitals that the chancelleries, convinced of the sincerity and the effectiveness of the constitutional order in Turkey, would intrust to Ottoman hands the task of dealing with the legitimate grievances of the subject peoples. This disposition of the destinies of their brothers by blood, language, and religion brought keen apprehension to the Servians, the Greeks, the Bulgarians, and the Montenegrins, who had been taught by bitter experience, dating back for many generations, to place no trust in any promise of reforms dependent upon Turkey for their execution.

The disillusionment within the borders of Turkey itself began in the autumn of the *anno mirabilis* 1908, when the preparations for the first general election under the newly established constitution disclosed the purpose of the party in power—the secret organization known as the Committee of Union and Progress—to control rigidly, by the aid of the bayonet and the power of arrest, the votes of the Christian population. In addition, the *rayahs* found that their representation in Parliament had been effectively scaled down to the end of giving them a purely nominal participation in the legislative body of the Empire, even in districts in which they outnumbered the Moslems in the ratio of three to one. Other causes of discontent cropped out before the echoes of the pæans to liberty had died down in Salonica. The Christian subjects discovered that, under the pledge to encourage education with the resources of the state, the Committee of Union and Progress contemplated the practical suppression of the schools that had been conducted by the various nationalities at enormous sacrifices through the period when the Turkish scheme of education was confined to the chanting of the “*Elif*,” “*Beh*,” “*Teh*,” “*Seh*,” and the mechanical repetition of passages from “*Al Koran*” in unintelligible Arabic in the courtyards of the mosques. The encroachment upon the schools of the subject nationalities by the Young Turks—an assault upon vital rights which had been secured to the conquered since the days of the conquest—indicated a purpose of Ottomanization that caused consternation among the subject races and gave quick alarm at Sofia, Belgrade, Athens, and Cettinje. Bulgar, Greek, Servian, and Montenegrin viewed with a common and intense abhorrence the aggressive project of the new masters at Constantinople to substitute the Otto-

man language for the Slavic or the Greek, and to establish central Ottoman control over a phase of their lives that had been recognized as peculiarly their own since the days of Amurath the First. In the unexpected crisis each wronged nationality cast about it for some means to enforce the maintenance of its historic privileges for the perpetuation of a culture far older and more advanced than that of the Turks who now sought to destroy it. The controversy grew bitter. Futile prayers gave way to violence. The Young Turks, chagrined by the untoward course of events, resorted to the argument that had always characterized the statecraft of the Old Turks—the argument of force. On the eve of the present conflict in the Balkans the region of the new and desperate *Kulturkampf* was traced by a long and dismal line of schools all through Thrace and Macedonia, which had been closed by the zeal of the reformers in behalf of the centralized Ottoman system which was designed to educate the ancient races of the Peninsula into good Turks with Turkish ideals and Turkish standards of civilization so painfully apparent in the annals of Turkish domination.

Against this new form of oppression, more insidious because more potentially effective than anything that had been attempted in the palmy days of Abdul Hamid, the states now in alliance took individual measures early in the course of the stormy Young Turkish administration. Friendly representations at Constantinople by the representatives of Balkan nations disclosed an uncompromising attitude at the seat of Ottoman power. These efforts in behalf of the *rayahs* had the unexpected result of substituting the scorpion for the whip, of adding vigor to the Ottoman effort to destroy the nationalities that were proving unamenable to the new order of things. The anarchy in Macedonia grew rapidly to the crisis which European diplomacy had been trying, in a futile and devious way, to avert as a menace to the peace of the world. The immediate incidents that precipitated collective action by the nations bordering upon Turkey are characteristic of Ottoman rule since its very beginning. Two conspicuous instances of official participation in massacres of Christians in Macedonia last summer sent the flames of resentment leaping high at the capitals of the Balkan States and Greece. The affair of Kotchana, where 174 Bulgarians were slaughtered with

the help of Ottoman regulars and gendarmerie, confronted Tsar Ferdinand, then on the eve of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his accession to the throne of Bulgaria, with a sudden and tumultuous demand for an immediate declaration of war against the Empire within whose boundaries such things were possible. The kingdom was convulsed with a passionate outburst of resentment which the Government did its best to control. It was the affair of Kotchana that gave peculiar point to Tsar Ferdinand's subsequent declaration that war was the only recourse left to the Balkan States in their determination to secure "tolerable conditions of life" to the Christians of Macedonia.

Hard upon the savage incident of Kotchana the Ottomans, with a sinister genius for doing things at the wrong time, put the village of Berane, almost within gunshot of the Montenegrin frontier, to the sword and the torch. It was while contemplating the smoking ruins of Berane, across the border of his gallant little kingdom, that King Nicholas of Montenegro commented bitterly to an English journalist, "War would be infinitely better than such a peace!" The tragedy of Berane set Servia and the "Black Mountain" ablaze. The people of Greece, kept in a state of chronic irritation by lesser, sporadic outrages upon Greeks across the line, joined their voice to the voices of the Balkan peoples for a united effort to wipe out the score that had been accumulating since the Ottoman conquest. The cry of spilled blood was shaping events to the purposes of belligerent minorities in all four kingdoms, who for many years had been urging the solution of the Near-Eastern question by the arbitrament of the sword.

At this moment of acute agitation European diplomacy found itself suddenly face to face with a new and portentous factor, destined now or later to exert a powerful, perhaps a decisive, influence upon the solution of the problem which has driven sleep from the pillows of statesmen since the Crimean War. The first intervention of the new force into the councils of the nations took the form of a collective note to the powers from Bulgaria, Servia, Greece, and Montenegro, outlining a scheme of autonomous administration, under Christian governors, for the Ottoman provinces across their respective frontiers. The chancelleries were momentarily paralyzed by astonishment at the discovery of indications that the impossible had been accomplished

—that nationalities which had been at war since time out of mind had been able to adopt a common counsel, to compose the rancors, resentments, and rivalries of a thousand years for a combined diplomatic campaign against a common foe. Yet not even at this advanced stage in the march of events did the discordant concert of Europe realize the true scope of the new and unexpected race movement upon the historic battle-ground of the nations. The suspicions of astute statesmen were not fully aroused even by the plain suggestion of complete unity of territorial purpose contained in that feature of the collective scheme of reforms which stipulated that the projected new administrative divisions should be established upon *ethnical* lines.

Impressed, nevertheless, by the exigencies of the situation as they understood it superficially, the chancelleries made a feverish effort to still the international storm that was rising amid the clank of arms on the Peninsula. The endeavors of diplomats quickly confronted the stone wall of discord—the same discord in the councils of Christendom which had enabled a disintegrating anachronism to maintain itself at Constantinople, in spite of the decree of doom which had been written upon the walls of the Mosque of Mahmoud by the inexorable finger of history.

Then came the astonishing crisis of affairs, when the Balkan League, by the presentation of its collective ultimatum to the Porte, stood forth in shining armor, strong, exigent, and determined to demonstrate the rights of the Balkan peoples and of Greece to work out their own destinies and solve for themselves the problems of race and of civilization upon the ancient soil of their patrimony. At this stage in the prelude of war the aims of the allies ceased to be purely humanitarian and became frankly territorial. The nations upon whom the heavy burden of Ottoman domination had rested with crushing weight since the battle of Vienna had laid their grievances collectively before Europe and had demanded the minimum of satisfaction. When the minimum had been denied them they announced their intention to enforce the maximum at the point of the bayonet upon an enemy who had the hordes of Asia at his back. From that instant the chancelleries correctly analyzed the struggle in the Balkans as a struggle to force the Turk out of Europe, and incidentally to serve a writ of ejectment upon the great powers who for generations had been exert-

ing themselves to shape events in the Balkans to their own purposes without regard to the legitimate interests of the peoples who have inhabited that region since the beginnings of recorded history.

For a breathing-spell of bewildered indecision Europe, united once more by the menace of the new peril to its selfish aims, looked on with lowering brows upon the commotion south of the Danube, and at last issued its collective command to the allies, "We forbid it." The answer of the allies to the voice which formerly had terrified them as separate States, working at cross purposes with one another, was the roar of the Montenegrin guns on the road to Scutari. On the 17th of October the long-deferred but inevitable Balkan War was a grim fact all along the line of contact between the Ottoman and his former chattels. The outbreak of hostilities was no new phenomenon in the history of nations, based upon ephemeral tendencies of the hour and prompted by transitory opportunism of the day. It was the resumption of the old conflict between Europe and Asia which Karl Martel fought out on the plain of Tours, which the Russians waged in the three hundred years of Mongol mastery and in our day on the Yalu, at Port Arthur, on the waters of Tsu-Shima; which overwhelmed Europe with the vast wave of the Hunnish invasion; of which the British, the French, the peoples of Spain and of Italy are now fighting rear-guard actions in India, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Morocco, and Tripolitania. The Bulgarian gray-coat sentry before the walls of Adrianople as surely typifies the march of European progress against the immobility of Asia as does the American army surgeon in his endeavors to stamp out the plague in the Philippines.

The battles of Kirk-Kilisseh, of Uskub, of Scutari, of Lule Burgas, in 1912, are only the logical resumption of the life-and-death struggle that reached a crisis at Kossovo Polie, in 1389, when the joint armies of Servia and Bulgaria were crushed by Sultan Amurath and the light of liberty went out on the Balkan Peninsula. During the long intermission of five centuries the conquered peoples have waited with clenched teeth for the coming of the morning. The glimmerings of dawn began to appear at the opening of the nineteenth century, the century of reviving nationalities. In 1912 the dawn has worn into daylight and the daylight has disclosed a new nation in Europe.

In the light of the brilliant military successes of the Bulgarians up to the walls of Constantinople, the Foreign Offices of the great powers are beginning to entertain diminishing illusions as to their power to re-establish the old order of things in Balkan affairs, when the *veto* of a foreign diplomat had the binding force of a divine dispensation at Sofia, at Belgrade, at Athens, and at Cetinje. Bulgaria, Servia, Greece, and Montenegro, for the purposes of resistance to European dictation, have merged themselves into the United States of the Balkans. By the exercise of some marvelous welding power, probably having its origin in the astute statesmanship of Tsar Ferdinand, which has accomplished one of the most notable international achievements of our time, the former enemies have combined their issues. They have taken their stand shoulder to shoulder in a calm, unalterable purpose to work out their own destinies. When the time comes for a readjustment of affairs, after the sword has been restored to its sheath, Europe is destined to discover that the new boundaries in the Balkan Peninsula have been traced in blood and that it will take blood—torrents of blood—to obliterate them and retrace the old ones. And it has long been an axiom of European diplomacy in the Near East that Europe is not prepared to sacrifice many Pomeranian grenadiers or Coldstream Guardsmen in an endeavor to regulate the affairs of the “Sick Man,” much as she desires to insure his survival until the opportune moment for the division of his estate shall arrive.

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